Seminar Summary Transcription

Re-evaluating the Home as a Core Institution in Climate Action

The Home & Climate Change Book Launch and Seminar has brought together key partners, collaborators, and researchers involved in the scholarly discourse and debate on the intrinsic relationship between our homes, as a key social, cultural, and economic institution, and the forces and impact of Climate Change as the most drastic environmental crisis of our time.

The interdisciplinary programme reflects on the collaboration with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), the Home Renaissance Foundation (HRF) and The University of York as host.

Welcome from Prof. Lorraine Farrelly

Founding Professor and Head of the Department of Architecture and the Built Environment at the University of York.

You are all very welcome today! I am truly delighted to extend a special greeting to Sir Bryan Sanderson, Chairman and Director of the vision behind the Home Renaissance Foundation—and an esteemed honorary doctorate recipient from the University of York.

As you know, our Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Professor Duncan Petrie, had already apologised at lunch for not being able to stay for the afternoon, as he had been called to an important meeting with the Vice-Chancellor. He asked me to pass on his apologies once again.

Prof. Farrelly welcomed future collaboration, emphasising the importance of research partnerships and acknowledging the Home Renaissance Foundation's vision of home as fundamental to making the book and other publications possible.

Thank you all for joining us today, and I hope that we can have many more future discussions like this going forward

Sir Bryan Sanderson CBE

Chairman of Home Renaissance Foundation

Speaking as a non-academic, Bryan explained the purpose of "Home Renaissance" an initiative recognised by the UN that integrates sociology, economics, climate, and law to understand the home. Reflecting on his humble upbringing in northern England and his LSE degree, he recounts a formative experience during the 1960s doing voluntary service in an impoverished, desert region of Peru. Initial hostility faded when he connected with local children through football. Living among families in severe poverty taught him that a home's true essence lies not in luxury, but in providing children with safety, security, and unconditional acceptance.

Bryan contrasted these core values with modern materialism, criticizing wealthy individuals who uproot their lives purely to avoid taxes. He stresses that in a rapidly changing world filled with modern distractions, remote work, and internet-driven shifts; the core purpose of a home remains paramount. Despite the complexity of publishing research on various aspects of the home, including climate change, the initiative's ultimate goal is to champion moral and social values over mere self-interest, ensuring the home remains a secure foundation where children feel safe and supported.

Sir Bryan concluded "it's a difficult, quite complex message to get across. But it's terribly important. So that's what we're about. And I've been very proud to be a part of it."

Prof. Gamal Abdelmonem

Chair of Architecture and the Founding Director Research at York School of Architecture.

In his introduction, Gamal highlighted the importance of understanding the home as central to addressing global warming. While climate policies often focus on technology, industry and emissions, he argues that meaningful change must also begin at home, through the way we live, design our homes and organise our communities.

Drawing on his long-standing collaboration with the Home Renaissance Foundation (HRF), he explained how interdisciplinary research brought together architects, social scientists, economists, legal experts and policymakers to explore the relationship between home and the planet. This work led to *One Planet, One Home: How to Reverse the Clock of Climate Change*, which seeks to translate research into practical policy recommendations.

His central message is that our homes and the planet are inseparable: the health of one depends on the care we give the other. Climate change is not a distant environmental problem; it directly affects homes, communities and human health, regardless of wealth or geographical location.

Ultimately, Prof. Abdelmonem called for a broader understanding of home, recognising its role in shaping behaviour, encouraging collective responsibility and contributing to a more sustainable future. He also emphasised the importance of bringing research beyond academia into public debate and policy, so that it can help change attitudes and influence decisions.

Professor María José Monferrer Freire

Associate Professor, Carlos III University. Madrid.

Maria Jose argued that to build long-term sustainable environments, we must address pressing demographic, technological, and infrastructure challenges through unified action:

Demographics & Rural Development: Europe's population is shrinking and aging. To keep seniors independent, we need "smart rural homes" equipped for remote care, reducing hospital travel. Young people must actively lead future planning, while targeted policies should incentivize companies to establish rural "knowledge hubs"—easing urban housing pressures and eliminating long commutes.

Innovation & Investment: European nations lag behind in innovation, with many private tech giants spending more on R&D than entire national budgets. Governments must meet or exceed innovation targets, aligning with businesses to ensure technological benefits return to society rather than just corporate balance sheets.

Infrastructure & Energy Pressures: Expanding digital tools and artificial intelligence require massive energy and water resources, worsening scarcity and conflicting with green transition goals. Bridging the digital and energy divides, will require infrastructure upgrades, optimized AI value chains, and potentially future options like small nuclear reactors, provided social adoption challenges are met.

Prof. Monferrer concluded “Technology, demographics, and business interests must align with societal needs. Without coordinated policy and shared direction between governments and industry, global disparities will continue to widen rather than close”.

Professor Amin Al-Habaibeh

Director of Product Innovation Centre, Nottingham Trent University

His presentation addressed the intersection of housing, occupant behaviour, and energy efficiency to combat climate change, highlighting key strategies to reduce domestic energy consumption.

Retrofitting Heritage & Existing Buildings: Retrofitting older homes with thermal insulation is essential, as space heating accounts for the vast majority of residential energy use. Utilizing thermal imaging, research demonstrates how uninsulated or partially insulated traditional buildings dissipate significant heat compared to modern, well-insulated structures.

The Impact of Human Behavior: High-performance thermal insulation alone is insufficient if occupant behavior is ignored. Sensor data reveals that residents frequently open windows in winter—often due to poor indoor air quality, humidity, or ventilation concerns—invalidating insulation benefits and leading to severe energy loss.

Smart Energy Usage & Demand Balancing: Energy reduction extends to everyday activities, such as adopting energy-efficient cooking methods (e.g., microwaves and air fryers over traditional ovens). Furthermore, shifting energy-intensive household tasks away from peak hours (5:00 PM–7:00 PM) to times when renewable solar and wind power are abundant helps balance the electrical grid.

Goal: Achieving net-zero goals requires a dual approach: combining effective building insulation and technology with behavioural adaptation regarding ventilation, air quality, and peak-time energy use.

Professor Nicholas Pleace

Associate Dean of Research, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of York

Home, Housing and Climate Change: A Social Science Perspective

The idea that housing is simply a place to live is relatively recent. Historically, homes were multifunctional spaces where economic, social and family life converged. Industrialisation, mass production and improved transport separated home from work, encouraging suburban living and a more individualised understanding of home.

Today, however, housing is increasingly commodified and financialised. It is treated as a market product and investment asset rather than a fundamental human need. Rentier capitalism, rising prices and gentrification undermine housing affordability and security, displacing communities and deepening social inequalities. Meanwhile, the retreat of the state from social housing has weakened access to affordable, secure accommodation.

A further distinction must be made between housing and home. Although home is often portrayed as a place of safety, care and belonging, it can also be a setting of violence, isolation and distress. A building alone cannot provide everything that makes a home: emotional support, family relationships, friendship networks, community and cultural identity are equally important.

These challenges are compounded by economic mobility, which increasingly separates people from their families and places of origin. Consequently, if home is to become a central part of the response to climate change, everyone must have access to a secure and meaningful home. This requires more than sustainable buildings and energy efficiency. It demands a fundamental reconsideration of housing as a human right, the role of the state, and the dominance of market forces over people's need for stability, belonging and security.

Prof. Rosa Lastra

Sir John Lubbock Chair in Banking Law, Centre for Commercial Law Studies, Queen Mary University of London

In her address, Rosa stressed that to build a sustainable home, we must establish an effective international legal framework. However, managing global finance or international relations cannot rely solely on the international level. Instead, it requires a multi-layered, multi-level governance framework that extends from the individual, local communities, and regions to national governments, regional bodies (such as the European Union), and international institutions. Within this multi-layered framework, we need meaningful norms and commitments.

While divergence fosters creativity and diversity in many areas of human life, climate protection and the preservation of our planet demand strict convergence. Key areas such as climate mitigation, climate adaptation, and climate consistency require unified global action.

Governments face the complex challenge of balancing competing priorities. As noted in a UK House of Commons report on sustainable development: "The general principle of sustainable development is to meet basic needs and improve the quality of life while ensuring that natural systems and resources are maintained and enhanced, both for the benefit of existing and future generations."

In practice, governments must reconcile environmental protection and natural resource management with economic growth and employment—objectives that are frequently in conflict. To anchor sustainable behaviour across individual, family, and government levels, we must look to deeper philosophical foundations. As Professor Gamal notes in Connected Homes for Older People: "*A home is a place where we can take shelter from inclement weather; an opportunity to enter and retire into our private space; a place for mental repose; a means for recruiting strength... Family, by default, is the primary and sustainable care provider in most nations and societies, regardless of age or social status*".

The association of the family as a unit and the home as a place is profound. Hence, the practices and attitudes of both do have a substantial impact on climate change. "*While modern climate policy often relies heavily on industry, technology, and policy mandates, it frequently overlooks the central role of the family and the home*. Ultimately, our relationship with the environment must be guided by the principle of stewardship rather than ownership—an idea echoed in Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical Laudato si'. *We are not owners of nature, but stewards whose responsibility is to preserve and pass on the planet in good shape to future generations.'*



